

Engaging Roman Catholics with the Gospel

By Brent Ray

Pre-Session Assignments

One week prior to the first sessions, participants will complete the following assignments.

Assignment One

If able, read chapter 1 of the book *Sharing the Good News with Roman Catholic Friends*. Be prepared to discuss the chapter with your group.

Assignment Two

Read the comments related to 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What did Paul mean when he said, “I am free from all” and “I have made myself a servant to all.”

Assignment Three

Using a topical concordance or index (such as the one at www.BibleGateway.com), identify two additional occasions where Paul shaped his presentation of the gospel to fit the specific situation where he was speaking.

Scripture to Memorize

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 1 Corinthians 9:19

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will be better equipped to guide their friends to a biblical understanding of eternal salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

The Bible teaches us that salvation is a personal gift, offered by God's grace, received through personal faith in Christ, and is both knowable in the present and assured for all eternity (see Romans 3:28; Ephesians 2:8–10; and 2 Timothy 1:9). Roman Catholicism, on the other hand, teaches that salvation comes through the sacraments of the Catholic Church (baptism, Eucharist, confirmation and penance), that there is no salvation apart from the Church, and that there is no assurance of salvation as it is a process and not an event. If one of your Catholic classmates asked you for help in understanding the gospel, how would you respond?

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 out loud.

Studying the Passage

The letter to the church at Corinth was written to address a list of serious problems that had arisen among the Jewish and Gentile believers (see 1 Corinthians 1:10). Among the issues that divided the church was the issue of eating meat that had been offered or sacrificed to idols (see Paul's description in 1 Corinthians 8:1–13).

Given the poverty in which the believers in Corinth found themselves, some of these Christians went to the pagan temples to eat the inexpensive, leftover meat from the pagan altars. However, many of the new (Paul referred to them as “weak”) believers found this to be offensive and even unclean. They wrote the apostle Paul, asking him to resolve the conflict that arose among the Christians in Corinth.

Verse 19. I am free from all. Paul could have appealed to his apostolic authority and put the debate to rest. He also could have produced a list of Scriptures demonstrating the foolishness of the Corinthian conflict. Instead, he declared that he was under no obligation to please man. To the contrary, he affirmed that he was free in Christ from the Law, tradition, ritual and sacrifice, and that he sought to please Christ alone (see Romans 8:1–5).

Verse 19. I have made myself a servant. Paul then said something absolutely amazing—that he chose to make himself the bond-servant or the slave of all. The phrase “I have made myself a slave” is only two words in Greek, meaning “I enslave” and “myself”. Even though Paul did not have the right to give up his freedom in Christ, he did have the freedom to give up his rights for the sake of the gospel.

Discussion Questions

What was Paul's motivation for this attitude (see 1 Corinthians 10:33)? Compare Paul's attitude to what we see in Christ in Philippians 2:6–7. Has there ever been a time when you had to surrender your own personal rights or privileges because of your faith in Christ?

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now share insights from reading the first chapter of *Sharing the Good News with Roman Catholic Friends*.

Discussion Question

What are some situations or circumstances where you might face the choice of setting aside your rights for the sake of those who don't know Jesus Christ as Savior?

On Your Own

In the space below draw a table with two columns, making a list of things the believer may and must not surrender in order to be a witness for Christ.

Studying the Passage

Paul was neither a hypocrite nor what some have referred to as a spiritual chameleon—constantly changing his religious views or convictions in order to please men. His essential message never changed with his audience, but the means by which he communicated this message often changed in accordance with the context and needs of his hearers. See, for example, Paul’s presentation to the men of Athens in Acts 17:22–34.

Verse 22. all things to all people. Paul spoke of setting aside his rights and privileges, assuming the form of a servant or slave, and the motive for Paul’s humble servitude was simple: **that by all means I might save some**. Paul was driven by an overwhelming passion to win the lost at any cost!

In this passage Paul provided us with five important and practical principles for witnessing:

1. Find common ground with those you want to win.
2. Avoid a know-it-all attitude and become a humble servant.
3. Help others feel accepted and heard.
4. Be respectful of their opinions and sensitive to their concerns.
5. Look for opportunities to tell them about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. (Adapted from the *Life Application Bible* notes on 1 Corinthians 9:22–23).

These five principles are just as valid for us today as they were for the Corinthians almost two thousand years ago.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now share an answer to the following question: What did Paul mean when he said, “I am free from all” and “I have made myself a servant to all.”

Discussion Question

How can a Christian today become all things to all men without compromising on biblical principles?

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now share about two

additional occasions where Paul shaped his presentation of the gospel to fit the specific situation where he was speaking.

Discussion Question

What are some occasions where your witness would be more effective by making your approach fit the culture or the situation (without changing the message)?

On Your Own

In the space below, list ways you can become a servant to your friends so they will more readily listen to your witness and be more open to the gospel message.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below, and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to. . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

Paul modeled for us the attitude with which we should seek to win the lost. He declared that we must willingly set aside our rights, privileges and traditions and adopt the attitude of a humble servant. This is what Jesus did in Philippians 2:6–7.

In addition, Paul modeled a passion for reaching the lost that should characterize every believer. Paul was almost overwhelmed by the urgency of preaching the gospel (see 1 Corinthians 9:16).

In the context of engaging and sharing Christ with your friends, keep in mind that the most effective way to present the gospel is to begin the discussion with things we have in common and not with our differences. Harsh debates or mean and overzealous apologetics seldom are effective.

Focus on the importance of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and the fact that this relationship (not a religion or a man-made tradition) is by grace, through faith alone (see Romans 3:28; Ephesians 2:8–10; and Titus 3:4–7).

Once you have engaged with your friend, guide him to examine the Scriptures regarding:

- the personal nature of salvation (Romans 5:8; 10:9–10; John 3:16)
- the means of salvation (Romans 5:1–2; Ephesians 2:8)
- the security of our salvation for those who are kept by Christ and not by works (2 Corinthians 1:21–22; Ephesians 1:13–14; 1 John 5:13)

If someone is offended by the Scriptures or by the exclusive claims of Christ (see John 14:6), that is their problem. If they are offended and turn away from Christ because of us—due to some extrabiblical behavior or norm, some tradition or practice, or an attitude that is something less than that of a humble servant—then it is our problem.

Therefore, seek to find the common ground with those you want to win. Be as good a listener as you are a talker. Avoid the attitude of a know-it-all and interact as a servant, putting aside your rights, personal traditions, and any extrabiblical standards you may have embraced. Focus, instead, on the never-changing message of the gospel (the “good news”) of Jesus Christ as preached by Paul (see 1 Corinthians 2:1–5).

Follow up Questions

What are some of the beliefs we share with Roman Catholics? How can these common perspectives serve as a starting place for engaging in a presentation of the gospel and your testimony regarding a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.